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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

Memorandum



THE SITUATION IN VIETNAM

Information as of 1600
27 May 1966

ARMY and DOS review(s) completed.

PREPARED FOR THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL
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HIGHLIGHTS

25X1 All personnel in the US Consulate building in Hue have been evacuated, and the city is quiet at present.

The French Press Agency in Hanoi has reported that Ho Chi Minh may have gone to China for talks with Mao Tse-tung.

I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam:
An ARVN 7th Division search-and-destroy operation in Kien Hoa Province has inflicted heavy losses on the Viet Cong (Para. 1). The Viet Cong have intensified their harassment campaign against commercial traffic in Saigon's main shipping channel (Para. 2).

II. Political Developments in South Vietnam:
On 27 May, the evacuation of US government officials and other civilians from Hue was carried out (Paras. 1-4). Premier Ky met with General Thi at the US Marine base at Chu Lai; details of the talk have not been disclosed (Para. 5). Demonstrations in Saigon on 27 May were larger than the few days previous but were still contained by riot police (Para. 6). Buddhists and GVN officials have issued communiqués governing the conduct of demonstrators in Saigon (Paras. 7-10). Premier Ky has reportedly received a Buddhist request that three cabinet members be replaced by Buddhist designees (Para. 11). The minister for foreign affairs feels that the Buddhists are seeking reconciliation with the GVN (Para. 12).

III. Military Developments in North Vietnam:
There is nothing of significance to report.

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[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] The
French Press Agency in Hanoi has reported that Ho
Chi Minh may have gone to China for talks with Mao
Tse-tung (Paras. 3-6). [REDACTED]

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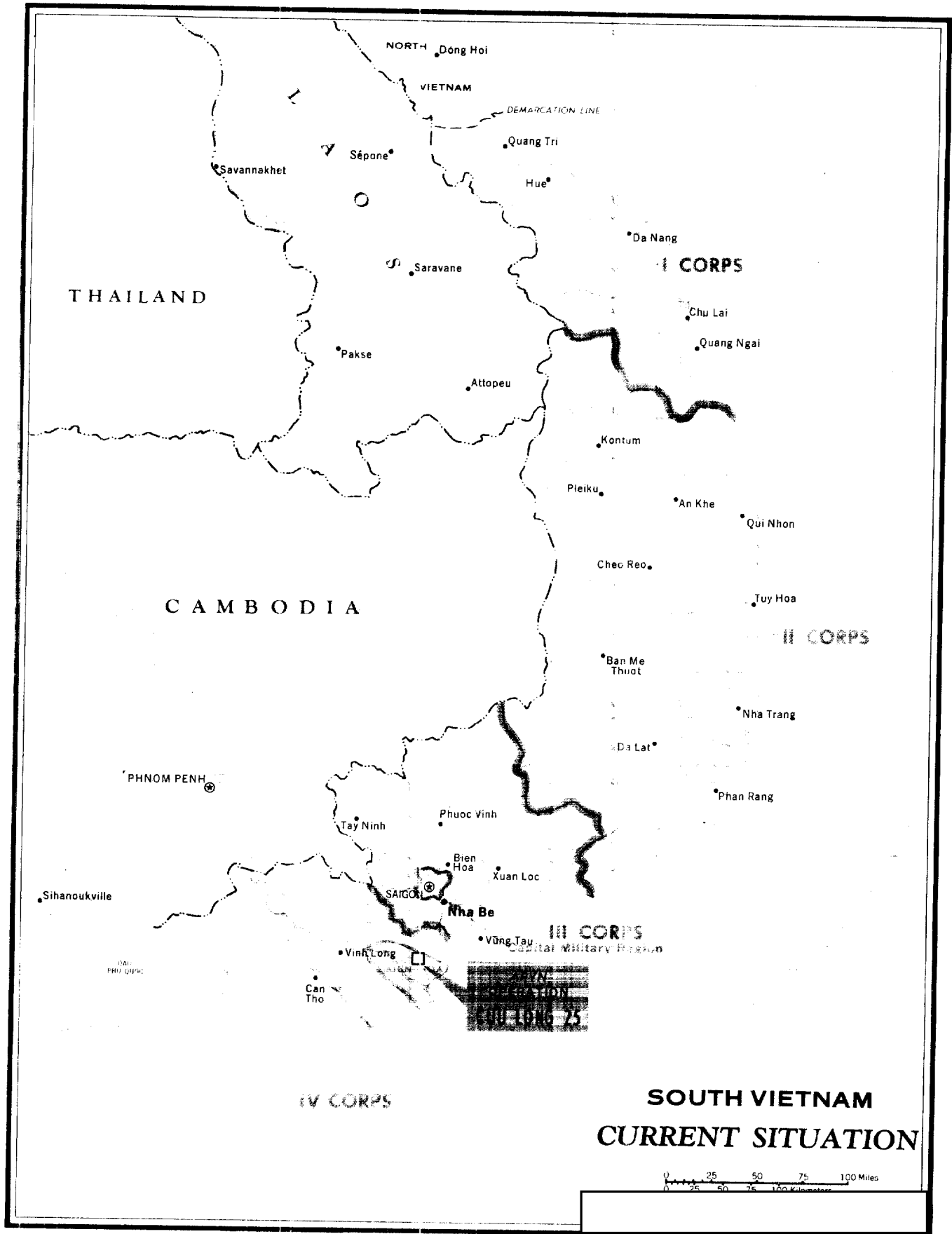
[REDACTED] Le Duc Tho
is leading the DRV delegation to the Czechoslovak
Party Congress (Para. 9).

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I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Three battalions of the ARVN 7th Division inflicted heavy losses on the Viet Cong yesterday during the conduct of one-day search-and-destroy Operation CUU LONG 25 approximately 45 miles south of Saigon, in Kien Hoa Province. According to ARVN sources, 68 enemy troops were killed, 18 captured, and 96 suspects apprehended, in contrast to government casualties of only one wounded.

Viet Cong Activity

2. The renewed Viet Cong harassment campaign against commercial shipping in the main channel to Saigon continued yesterday. A Panamanian merchant ship anchored at Nha Be, six miles southeast of Saigon, experienced an explosion believed to be from a Communist underwater mine attached to the anchor cable. However, no casualties or damage to the ship were reported. Shortly after this incident, an explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) team, which had been dispatched to check other ships at anchor in the area, discovered a mine attached to the anchor chain of a US merchant ship carrying a full cargo of USAF ammunition. The search for additional explosive devices continues.

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II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

Hue

1. On 27 May, 45 US government employees and civilians were evacuated to Saigon. During the evening of the 27th, the 12 remaining US Consular officers and other government officials moved to the nearby MACV compound, leaving the consulate empty.

2. The US Consul gave the order to clear the consulate building when it became apparent that the government troops assigned to protect the US installation were in sympathy with the "struggle" forces. The province chief, in command of these government troops, has abandoned his command and moved to a village about five miles outside the city, according to press reports.

3. A group of monks who had been conducting a hunger strike in front of the consulate left their positions when the US personnel departed. There is no report that the consulate building has been entered, and MACV reports that the situation in Hue is presently quiet.

4. A broadcast by the "Popular Struggle Force for Revolution" over Radio Hue today called on all its followers "strictly to observe discipline and to avoid committing acts of violence" in the city. Press reports quote the senior US military officer in Hue as having stated that he has taken maximum precautions to protect US personnel at the compound.

Ky-Thi Meeting

5. Premier Ky today flew to the US Marine base at Chu Lai for a meeting with former I Corps commander General Thi, who arrived by US helicopter. Details of their talk are not yet available. Premier Ky later went to Da Nang, where he told newsmen that troops would remain in the city as long as necessary. However, he also stated that the restoration of government control over Hue "is better done by diplomacy."

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Saigon

6. Buddhist monks attempting to organize demonstrations against the government were active in the capital again on 27 May. The US Embassy reported that such efforts at four separate locations in the city in the morning were unsuccessful. Progovernment marines using tear gas grenades dispersed marchers carrying anti-American banners who filed into the streets after listening to speeches at the Buddhist Institute on the evening of 27 May, according to press reports. The content of the speeches was not reported.

7. Thich Minh Chau, the rector of the Buddhist University in Saigon, feels that more violence there can be expected. He noted that the Americans must maintain an effort to bring the pro- and antigovernment sides together for talks. Following the current Buddhist line, however, he added that Americans should "stop supporting Ky" because the situation is beginning to resemble (former US Ambassador) "Nolting's support of Diem."

8. A Buddhist Institute communiqué carried in an Institute-supported Saigon newspaper claims that the Thich Tam Chau cable from Bangkok asking followers to cease demonstrations was not sent to the Institute; the paper's disclaimer suggests that the Institute, in Chau's absence, will not adhere to a no-demonstration position.

9. A National Police communiqué today stated that police have been ordered to check the identification papers of all persons--including clergymen--whenever necessary in fulfilling their security responsibilities. The communiqué cited recent evidence that the Viet Cong have ordered their cadres to infiltrate the ranks of the clergy in order to incite the masses to illegal action.

10. A second communiqué issued by the National Police today demanded the immediate release of the chairman of the Saigon student union who was reportedly

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[redacted]

kidnaped and is being held in a pagoda in the capital. Should the captive not be released, the communiqué stated, the police "will take necessary measures to protect the law and citizens' lives."

Buddhists Reportedly Desire Cabinet Positions

11. Prime Minister Ky, after his meeting with General Thi at Chu Lai on the morning of the 27th, reportedly said he had received a request from Thich Thien Minh to grant the Buddhists the ministry posts of Interior, Foreign Affairs, and Information. Ky has reportedly made other references to such a Buddhist request recently, but his allegations have not been confirmed. However, the incumbents of some of these ministries have been under Buddhist attack.

Buddhist Layman's Meeting with Minister of Foreign Affairs

12. Tran Van Do, minister of foreign affairs,

[redacted] met on 26 May with the influential Buddhist layman, Tran Quang Thuan at Minh's suggestion. Phan Huy Quat, whose current stand is that the Ky government must stand down before long, also attended the meeting. Do told a US Embassy officer after the meeting that the Buddhists are maneuvering for a reconciliation with the government from a position of weakness after the events in Da Nang since 15 May. Do feels that while the Buddhists are asking for the resignation of the Directorate, they would settle for much less. Do added that Ky is in an untenable position and that the crisis would not "drop up" of its own accord. The fanaticism of the militant Buddhists, in Do's opinion, has been aggravated by the Buddhist Institute decision not to hold its usual celebrations surrounding the anniversary on 3 June of Buddha's birth.

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III. MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTH VIETNAM

1. There is nothing of significance to report.

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V. COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

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Ho Chi Minh Reportedly in China

3. The French Press Agency (AFP) representative in Hanoi reported on 27 May that Ho Chi Minh may be in China to discuss the Vietnam situation with Mao Tse-tung. According to the French correspondent, "diplomatic circles" in Hanoi report that Ho left for China around 19 May.

4. There is no information to confirm or deny this report. Ho has not been reported in the Hanoi press, however, as appearing in public since 15 May.

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5. The report of Ho's trip, however, should be taken with some caution. The same French news agency reported last November that Ho was in China but this turned out to be false.

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6. Such a trip by Ho if it has taken place, would suggest some unpublicized development affecting relations between Peking and Hanoi. Ho has not been out of the country since 1961. During the past several years, he has dispatched his top assistants on a number of occasions to both Peking and Moscow to iron out difficulties which have arisen. If Ho now feels it necessary to go meet Mao personally, it would suggest that serious problems have come up which lesser party figures cannot handle.

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DRV Delegation to Czechoslovak Communist Party Congress

9. A North Vietnamese party delegation headed by politburo member Le Duc Tho left Hanoi on 26 May to attend the 13th Congress of the Czechoslovak Communist Party scheduled to open on 31 May. In recent months, Tho has often represented the North Vietnamese party in dealing with foreign Communist parties. Last year he hosted several visiting party delegations in Hanoi, met with party officials in France and Eastern Europe, and headed the DRV delegation to the Fourth Congress of the Rumanian Workers Party.

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